

SECTION 5

Agency Coordination and Public Involvement

The Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) provided regular opportunities for project area residents, local government officials, and state and federal review agencies to learn about and provide input to the U.S. 67 Expressway study.

This chapter summarizes the public involvement process and agency coordination activities throughout data gathering, the corridor study process, development and refinement of alternatives, and preparation of this Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS). The public involvement process was inclusive of all residents in the study area and did not exclude anyone because of income, race, color, religion, national origin, sex, age, or handicap.

5.1 Scoping Process

The Notice of Intent to prepare an EIS for this project appeared in the June 22, 1995, issue of the *Federal Register*. In May 1995, a preliminary scoping document was mailed to federal and state agencies, U.S. and state senators and representatives, local governmental municipalities, and environmental groups. A scoping meeting was held in Beardstown on June 22, 1995, to introduce the project team, discuss the purpose and scope of the study, present the study schedule and activities, review the project corridor, and obtain comments on the range of environmental issues that should be considered in developing alternatives and in the environmental document.

About 70 people attended the meeting, including 15 representatives from IDOT and its consultant staff. Agency representatives included the Illinois Department of Agriculture (IDOA), the National Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), and the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR). Other attendees included federal, county, and municipal officials, as well as utility representatives and interested individuals. Representative comments at the scoping meeting included:

- The Cass County Board read into the record a resolution of support for the project.
- IDNR expressed concerns about potential impacts to natural areas, such as the Beardstown Marsh.
- Concerns were raised about maintaining access across the Illinois River during construction of an upgraded or improved facility.
- The City of Rushville stated that alternatives to bypasses should take into account the city's plans to expand Scripps Park Golf Course.

- IDOA stated that consideration should be given to minimizing farm parcel severances or creation of uneconomic remnants.
- Comments were made that consideration should be given to use design standards that minimize the need for additional right-of-way.
- Comments were made that most travelers from Jacksonville to Beardstown travel Arenzville-Concord Road, and then Arenzville Road to Beardstown because it is a shorter distance than traveling on existing U.S. 67.

5.2 Cooperating Agencies

State and federal agencies that agreed to serve as cooperating agencies for this project include the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency (IEPA), U.S. Coast Guard, IDOA, and IDNR (Appendix B contains coordination letters). The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACOE) (Rock Island District) agreed to review the document but declined serving as a formal cooperating agency.

A coordination meeting was held on August 21, 1995, with the USACOE (both St. Louis and Rock Island districts), the U.S. Coast Guard, and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) (minutes of this meeting can be found in Appendix B). The purpose of the meeting was to brief the agencies unable to attend the scoping meeting in June, discuss issues identified as significant through the scoping process and solicit additional comments, and determine permit needs and roles of each agency in further coordination efforts. Several issues were discussed at the meeting.

Under Section 9 of the Rivers and Harbors Act of 1899, the U.S. Coast Guard is the sole agency having review and permit authority as it relates to the Illinois River bridge location, structure, and associated impacts. Section 401 of the Clean Water Act (CWA) covers the bridge crossing and the Coast Guard is responsible for obtaining Water Quality Certification from the appropriate issuing authority. The USACOE is responsible for the Section 404 aspects which is manifested in the form of Nationwide Permit 15 (Title 33 CFR Part 330, Appendix A). The U.S. Coast Guard indicated that it would prefer a single bridge structure to siting a new bridge downstream and keeping the old bridge open.

The USACOE stated that for small stream crossings, providing typical design sections would provide adequate detail for their permitting requirements. The only exception would be if there was some unique situation. They would also need typical detail on working and staging areas. The USACOE will determine which crossings will require an individual permit and which portions can be combined and covered by a nationwide permit.

5.3 NEPA/404 Process

This project was coordinated under the Statewide Implementation Agreement (SIA) for Concurrent National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)/404 Process, which was designed to involve key agencies early in the process and avoid possible oversights in the process. The process involved periodic meetings between state and federal resource agencies to discuss the project. The NEPA/404 process involved three formal concurrence points: purpose and need, alternatives to be studied in detail, and selection of the preferred alternative.¹ Documentation of activities and correspondence relating to this process can be found in Appendix C.

On April 30, 1996, an interagency meeting was held to discuss this project and grant concurrence for “purpose and need” and “alternatives selected for detailed evaluation.” In addition to IDOT, agencies in attendance included FHWA, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA), USACOE, and IDNR. At the meeting, the interagency group concurred with the alternatives recommended for further study. However, it recommended changes to the fundamental purpose and need for the project, and also recommended that additional facility types be considered. In order to satisfy those comments, the “purpose and need” section was revised and resubmitted to the commenting agencies for review. No further comments were received from the agencies.

On April 19, 2002, the final concurrence point meeting was held regarding the selection of the preferred alternative. In addition to IDOT, agencies in attendance included the FHWA, USEPA, USACOE, USFWS, IDNR, and IDOA. At the meeting, the interagency group unanimously concurred with Alternative E as the preferred alternative. Overall, the interagency group commented that Alternative E accomplished the project purpose and need with the least impact to environmental resources.

5.4 Other Agency Coordination

Several technical reports were prepared in conjunction with this study.

- An Agricultural Report was prepared, documenting potential agricultural and farmland impacts. This report was provided to the IDOA for review and comment. IDOA provided written comments on this document. Their comments were taken into consideration during preparation of the DEIS. In addition, IDOA prepared the USDA/NRCS AD 1006 form, based on input and coordination between IDOT and IDOA. The USDA/NRCS AD 1006 form is included in Appendix K of this document.

¹ Concurrence means written determination that information is adequate to agree that the project can be advanced to the next stage of the project development; and agencies agree not to revisit the previous process steps unless conditions change.

- A Wetland Technical Report was prepared and coordinated with both the St. Louis and Rock Island USACOE offices. The IDOA also requested and received the Wetland Technical Report.
- A Natural Resource Notebook was prepared, documenting all of the natural resources in the study area and impacts based on the proposed alternatives. This notebook was distributed to IDNR for its review. IDNR provided written comments on this document. Their comments were taken into consideration during preparation of the DEIS.
- A Biological Assessment **was prepared and distributed** to IDNR and USFWS. **Both the IDNR and the USFWS reviewed the Biological Assessment/ Detailed Action Report. The USFWS, based on their review, offered no additional comments pertaining to threatened and endangered species. The IDNR offered several comments, discussed in Section 4.3.5.3 - *Threatened and Endangered Species*, and has closed consultation under the Illinois Endangered Species Act (see Appendix L).**

5.5 Public Outreach

The general public and local agencies have been involved during the Draft EIS preparation. The following section summarizes information that was available to the public at various public meetings and through the distribution of project newsletters. The public was also given the opportunity to submit written comments throughout the course of the project.

5.5.1 Public Meetings

Two sets of public information meetings were held during the project study. Meetings were announced through advertisements in area newspapers and project newsletters. Because of the project length and number of communities involved, each meeting was held in several locations throughout the project corridor. The sessions were held in an open house format.

5.5.1.1 First Set of Public Meetings

The first set of public meetings were held on October 4, 1995, in Rushville, and on October 5 in Beardstown, to present the three alternatives evaluated in the south sector (corridors E, B, and A) and the bypass alternatives for Beardstown, Rushville, and Industry. The meetings were publicized through advertisements in four local newspapers: the *Illinoian Star*, *Jacksonville Journal-Courier*, *Rushville Times*, and the *Macomb Journal*. Project newsletters announcing the meeting were sent to property owners, local units of government, utilities, state agencies, elected officials, and other interest groups. Meeting exhibits included aerial photography of the project area depicting project alternatives, information comparing project alternative impacts, advantage and disadvantage matrices for alternatives, and project schedule. The meeting in Rushville was attended by about

100 people, and the meeting in Beardstown was attended by about 200 people. Eight TV, radio, and newspaper representatives attended the Rushville meeting; and two representatives attended the Beardstown meeting. Comments at the first meetings included:

- Desire to attract business and economic development throughout the corridor area, and support for a 4-lane expressway.
- Concerns about loss of cropland.
- Concerns about the economic effects of a highway bypassing a community, particularly as it related to Rushville and Beardstown alternatives.
- Concerns about types of access that would be provided (full versus partial access)
- Drainage and floodplain impacts, and how the proposed roadway would affect drainage patterns.
- Concern about eventual construction staging for the bridge over the Illinois River.
- Concern about potential impacts to the Schuyler County Airport in Rushville.

More than 100 comments were submitted following the public meetings: 80 comments related to the Beardstown area and south corridor alternatives, 15 related to the Rushville alternatives, and the remainder related to Industry alternatives.

5.5.1.2 Second Set of Public Meetings

The second set of public meetings was held on September 28, 1999, in Rushville and on September 29, in Beardstown to present Alternatives E and A, as well as the two Rushville Bypass alternatives. The meetings were publicized through advertisements in the following local newspapers: the *Illinoisian Star*, *Jacksonville Journal-Courier*, *Bluffs Times*, *Rushville Times*, and the *Macomb Journal*. A project newsletter announcing the meeting was sent to over 900 people on the mailing list, including property owners, local units of government, utilities, state agencies, elected officials, and other interest groups. Meeting exhibits included orthodigital aerial photography with the engineering alignments overlaid on them. Matrices comparing project alternative impacts were displayed and were also provided as handouts. Other exhibits included cross section, traffic, and project schedule exhibits. About 125 people attended the meeting in Rushville, and about 175 people attended the meeting in Beardstown. Comments at the meetings included:

- Concern about loss of cropland and severances to farm property as well as concern over impact to irrigation areas.
- Concern for the economic effects that the bypasses might have to businesses in the communities, noting that people tend to drive by, rather than stop.

- Concern for the proposed route in the vicinity of Chapin, stating that it would isolate the community and adversely impact the one business (Junction Sales Convenience Store) on existing U.S. 67.
- The majority of the attendees were supportive of the proposed expressway, suggesting that it should be built as soon as possible.
- Some commentors stated that a modern 2-lane improvement would be a sufficient improvement for the area.
- Some attendees expressed drainage and flooding concerns along Alternative E, which is within the Illinois River floodplain.
- Some attendees stated that Alternative A was better, because it is a shorter route.
- Many attendees stated that Alternative A would be beneficial to Arenzville because truck traffic would no longer go directly through their town or past Triopia School.
- Attendees preferred the “overpass” alternative option in the vicinity of Triopia School.
- Most written comments expressed support for the Rushville West Bypass over the Far West Bypass, because it would be closer to the community and existing businesses. (Subsequent to the meeting, the plans for the prison were finalized, which made the West Bypass infeasible.)
- Several commentors stated that an intersection was not required at U.S. 67 and Parkview Road. They noted that the local road is not of a standard that could support being used as an “exit” to Rushville. Several others noted that children bicycle to the park and pool on this road and that additional traffic would cause safety concerns.

A total of 108 written comments were received at or following the public meetings. In addition, one petition with 241 signatures was received in support of Alternative A.

5.5.1.3 Public Hearing

The Public Hearings were held from 4:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. on August 8, 2001 at Rushville Middle School in Rushville; and on August 9, 2001 at Gard School in Beardstown. The public hearing notice was mailed to all potentially affected property owners along both corridor routes, as well as to everyone on the mailing list (an estimated 1,000 people). In addition, notice of the hearings were publicized in the following local newspapers:

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|--------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| • The Macomb Journal | • The Scott County Times |
| • The State Journal Register | • The Jacksonville Journal Courier |
| • The Meredosia Budget | • The Bluff Times |
| • The Rushville Times | • The Triopia Tribune |
| • The Cass County Star Gazette | |

The same information was presented at both meetings. Personnel from the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) and their consultants were present to answer questions and receive comments about the study. Aerial exhibits detailing the location of the two corridor alternatives and other exhibits were presented at the meetings for review. A court reporter was present to record oral comments from attendees, a comment box was provided for those wishing to provide written statements, and a comment form with a self-addressed return mailing label was provided for those who wanted to mail their comments. In addition, a Spanish translator was available for attendees whose first language was Spanish, rather than English.

The meeting in Rushville was attended by 125 people. The meeting in Beardstown was attended by 166 people.

At the hearing in Rushville, the following from the media were present: WGEM TV/Radio; WJEQ/WMQZ/WNLF Radio; WIUM / WIUW, Macomb Radio; and WJEQ Radio. At the hearing in Beardstown, representatives from the Jacksonville Journal Courier and the Cass County Star Gazette were present.

Morgan and Cass counties, and the cities of Jacksonville, South Jacksonville, Beardstown, and Rushville all passed resolutions supporting the selection of Alternative E. In addition, the Jacksonville Regional Economic Development Corporation Board and the Brown County Development Board have both gone on record favoring Alternative E. The Western Prairie Audubon Society submitted a petition favoring Alternative E, stating that Alternative A would impact many threatened and endangered species. Finally, a petition signed by 102 landowners and concerned citizens was filed, supporting selection of Alternative A.

5.5.1.4 Small Group Meetings

Thirteen small group meetings were held during the course of the study to discuss the project, obtain input on alternatives and impacts, and address issues unique to each community or special group.

Community Meetings Following the First Set of Public Meetings

Following the public meetings in October 1995, the communities of Chapin, Arenzville, Meredosia, and Rushville made requests for additional information meetings. Four meetings were held throughout the fall of 1995 in each of these communities. Comments and issues raised at these meetings included:

- General support for an upgraded facility for the area.
- Comments regarding the proximity of Corridor A to Triopia School.
- Comments regarding the heavy volumes of Excel truck traffic through Arenzville, and support for an expressway that would re-route that traffic.
- Many farmers stated that farms along the railroad tracks were small, and therefore more sensitive to property encroachments.

- Agreement among airport users that relocating the Schuy-Rush Airport runway was not a problem as long as it was relocated within the community.
- Concern for impacts to Rushville's downtown and the U.S. 67/U.S. 24 commercial intersection if U.S. 24 was rerouted.
- Agreement that both Rushville bypass alternatives were within reasonable proximity to town.
- Concern that a Rushville through-town route would create a physical barrier within the community and separate the park and potential development areas from the rest of town.
- Comments that Meredosia has major industries that use U.S. 67 and the existing route is preferable from Meredosia's perspective.

Community Meetings Following the Second Set of Public Meetings

Following the public meetings in September 1999, the communities of Chapin, Meredosia, Rushville, and Concord made requests for additional information meetings. Four meetings were held throughout the summer of 2001 in each of these communities. Comments and issues raised at these meetings included:

- **Comment that the reasons for shifting Alignment E to the north were due to avoiding the displacement of a historic gas station and cemetery; however, these structures have been removed. Thus, there was concern as to why Alignment E is still shifted to the north.**
- **Concern for when a decision will be made and the timeframe of construction.**
- **Concern whether turn lanes would be incorporated at the intersection of U.S. 67 and IL 100, and if the intersection could be moved.**
- **Concern if new roads would be flood-proofed.**
- **Comment that the Draft EIS does not mention the industry in Meredosia.**
- **Concern about how the alignment will affect traffic along the Arenzville-Concord Road.**

5.5.1.5 Drainage Commissioners Meeting

On November 20, 1995, a meeting was held with the Drainage District Commissioners south of the Illinois River to discuss drainage issues and problems that they foresaw due to the different possible alignments of the proposed U.S. 67 expressway. The general consensus of the drainage commissioners was that the proposed alignment along Boulevard Road (Corridor B) would be least desirable due to flooding problems with Indian Creek.

5.5.1.6 Triopia School Board Meeting

On May 17, 1996, a meeting was held with the Triopia School Board to discuss the proposed “A” corridor in response to a letter from the School Superintendent stating opposition due to perceived safety issues surrounding the railroad/expressway/Triopia Road intersection and devaluation of the school’s tax base. After a presentation of the study, IDOT answered questions and discussed comments and concerns regarding the project. Generally, the sentiment at the meeting favored Alternative E to get the road away from the school, or favoring the overpass if Alternative A were selected.

5.5.1.7 Industry Meeting

Study staff met with representatives of the Village of Industry at a restaurant in Macomb on November 22, 1996. The Village trustees were most concerned as to how the expressway would impact their community, particularly as to the number of displacements. The various bypass options were explained. Questions were raised and answered regarding the pavement cross section and safety (particularly at the Windmill). The Trustees were asked to prepare a written resolution setting forth the village’s position. On January 6, 1997, the Village of Industry notified IDOT that it had unanimously voted to support the far west proposed bypass around the community (Appendix B, *Miscellaneous Coordination*, contains a copy of letter).

5.5.1.8 Arenzville/Concord Meeting

On September 23, 1998, IDOT met with residents from Concord and Arenzville to update them on the status of the project. The meeting was held in the cafeteria at Triopia School. About 100 people attended the meeting, in which IDOT updated the attendees on the alternatives under consideration and asked for comments. Attendees expressed the following concerns at the meeting:

- Many stated that the proposed school crossing in the vicinity of Triopia School was unsafe.
- Residents stated that they had moved to the country to get away from highway traffic and noise, and that they did not want the project.
- Some attendees asserted that Illinois had the worst highway system in the whole country.
- Many questioned the need for the project.
- Many were concerned about farm severances and the amount of prime farmland being taken.

5.5.1.9 Friends of 67 Meeting

On September 9, 1999, an open-house style meeting was held with the “Friends of 67” group at Rushville High School. Aerial exhibits displaying Alternatives A and E and the two Rushville Bypass options were shown. In addition, summary comparative

information on the corridors was displayed on boards. Twenty-six people attended the meeting to view the information. District Engineer Victor Modeer presented a brief overview of the information displayed and encouraged attendees to look at information and ask questions. Senator Laura Kent-Donahue and Representative Rich Meyers also addressed the group. Attendees asked questions about the study schedule, process, next steps, and funding for the project.

5.5.2 Project Newsletters

Project newsletters were prepared and distributed during the course of the study. The newsletters were sent to local units of government (county, municipal, drainage districts, townships), review agencies, federal and state officials, utilities, members of “Friends of 67,” and project area residents.

The first newsletter (May 1995) introduced the project and the study team. It provided an overview of the project development process and where this study was relative to that process, described the features of the study, explained the public and agency involvement process, and announced the study schedule. The newsletter contained a self-addressed form for submitting comments. It also provided a project contact name and telephone number.

The second newsletter (September 1995) announced the dates and locations of the upcoming public meetings, described the corridor alternatives that would be presented, and provided a map detailing alternatives. It also contained the self-addressed form for submitting comments.

The third newsletter (August 1996) summarized the corridor study and selection of alternatives to be carried forward for detailed analysis. It also highlighted public participant comments that helped shape corridor recommendations. The self-addressed form for submitting comments was included.

The fourth newsletter (September 1999) announced the dates and locations of the public meetings. It also included a schedule showing the Location/Design Study Process, and where the study was in the process. The self-addressed form was included for submitting mailback comments. The newsletter was sent to over 900 people on the mailing list.

The fifth newsletter (July 2001) announced the dates and locations of the public hearings. It also summarized the features of the project and provided a description and comparison of the alternative alignments. The self-addressed form for submitting comments was included.

The sixth newsletter (January 2002) announced the selection of the preferred alternative.

5.5.3 Written Comments

Self-addressed comment forms were available at every public meeting. Meeting attendees were given the opportunity to complete the comment forms at the meeting or send them after the meetings. In addition, each of the six newsletters had a self-addressed comment form insert for filling out and returning. All input was considered in developing and refining the alternatives presented in this document.

The written comments received from agencies, local communities, and individuals at the public hearing are summarized in the following section. For a complete copy of all letters and responses, see Appendix L.

5.6 Draft EIS Comments

The Notice of Availability for the Draft EIS was published on July 27, 2001. The comment period closed on September 17, 2001.

A total of 80 written comments were received within the period from the release of the Draft EIS through September 17, 2001. In addition, seven oral statements were made to the court reporters at the hearings. Of the comments received, 31 comments (36 percent) indicated a preference for Alternative E and 19 (22 percent) indicated a preference for Alternative A, with the remaining indicating no preference for either alternative.

Table 5-1 presents an index of comments received during the public hearing and during the Draft EIS availability period. All of the comments are contained in Appendix L of the Final EIS and can be reviewed in their entirety including several anonymously written comments.

TABLE 5-1
Index of Commentors

Author	Organization/Individual	Author	Organization/Individual
Kenneth A. Barr, Chief, Economic and Environmental Analysis Branch	U.S. Army Corp of Engineers	Craig A Myers, President	Beardstown Chamber of Commerce*
James V. Bildilli, Chief Engineer	Illinois Department of Transportation, Division of Aeronautics	Andrew F. Applebee, Chairman of Jacksonville Savings Bank; John C. Williams, Vice President and Manager	Chapin State Bank*
Bernard P. Killian, Deputy Director	Illinois Environmental Protection Agency	Scott Bowen, Manager Transportation Safety	DOT Foods*

TABLE 5-1
Index of Commentors

Author	Organization/Individual	Author	Organization/Individual
Scott B. Gudes, Acting Under Secretary for Oceans and Atmosphere Administrator and Deputy Under Secretary	U.S. Department of Commerce	P. Devon Davismeyer	Illinois Road Contractors, Inc.*
Steve Hamer	Illinois Department of Natural Resources	Kent Nixon	Integrated Agri, Inc.*
Warren D. Goetsch, Division Manager, Natural Resources	Illinois Department of Agriculture	Nolan Bangert, Branch Manager	Meredosia Community Bank*
Kenneth A. Westlake, Chief, Environmental Planning and Evaluation Branch, Office of Strategic Environmental Analysis	U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA)	Mike Kirchhoff, CED, Executive Director	Jacksonville Regional Economic Development Corporation*
Bruce L. McLaren, Project Manager by Direction of the District Commander	U.S. Coast Guard	Danny R. Little, Director	Morgan County RPC*
Michael T. Chezick, Regional Environmental Officer	U.S. Department of the Interior	Larry D. Dunn	Brown County Development Corporation*
Richard C. Nelson, Supervisor of Rock Island Field Office	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service	Robert Heady	Individual*
Steve A. McCarty	Triopia CUSD #27*	Alice Henry	Individual*
Jo Ann Aufdenkamp	Individual*	David F. Hess	Individual*
James Bartlow	Individual*	Herbert Hinnners	Individual*
Becker Family	Individual*	Stan Hoffman	Individual*
Zeta Blais	Individual*	S.J. Hughes	Individual*
Harold and Pat Boldt	Individual*	Darlene Huppe	Individual*
Max Brockhouse	Individual*	James and Sharon Huppe	Individual*
Tom Burrus	Individual*	Robert and Mary Kircher	Individual*
Mary J. Clark	Individual*	William Kleinschmidt	Individual*

TABLE 5-1
Index of Commentors

Author	Organization/Individual	Author	Organization/Individual
Steve Clement	Individual*	Norman Korsmeyer	Individual*
Pat Cooper	Individual*	Willard Korsmeyer	Individual*
John E. and Ellen M. Crawford	Individual*	Earl and Leona Lovekamp	Individual*
Marc Dahman	Individual*	Marty McCombs	New Dominion Farms of Illinois*
Sally Dahman	Individual*	Charles and Norma Metz	Individual*
Molly Darst	Individual*	Marilyn and Jack Moore	Individual*
Dora Dawson	Individual*	Vail H. Moore	Individual*
James DeBoer	Individual*	Myrna Morell	Individual*
Joyce DeBoer	Individual*	Paul Mueller	Individual*
Francis Detmer	Individual*	Harold Nordich	Individual*
Larry Dunn	Individual*	Orval Powell	Individual*
Sheila Duesterhaus	Individual*	Virgil L. Powell	Individual*
Bill and Bettigail Dyche	Individual*	Roy C. Roberts	Individual*
Larry L. Elder	Individual*	Pastor John Rothfusz	Individual*
Christina S. Estes	Individual*	Brian Ruch	Individual*
Janice R. Gaskill	Individual*	Phillip and Jeanette Schiskr	Individual*
Catherine A. Palm-Gessner	Individual*	Stanley W. Stoch	Individual*
Scott Gregory	Individual*	Jon Stock	Individual*
Jennifer Heady	Individual*	Frederica Schmitt Whiting	Individual*
Donna J. Tegeder	Individual*	Helen L. Winkelman	Individual*
Tina Vernor	Individual*	William and Helen Winkelman	Individual*
Tom Vorbeck	Individual*	John E. Wood	Individual*
Michelle Werries	Individual*	Don E. Wessler	Individual*

TABLE 5-1
Index of Commentors

Author	Organization/Individual	Author	Organization/Individual
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* Public Comments

5.6.1 Agency Comments

Agency comments received during the study process and project public hearings were fully considered in the selection of the preferred alternative. Among the respondents were ten regulatory agencies, including:

- U.S. Department of Interior, Office of the Secretary
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA)
- IDOT Division of Aeronautics
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Rock Island District (USACOE)
- U.S. Coast Guard
- Illinois Environmental Protection Agency (IEPA)
- Illinois Department of Agriculture (IDOA)
- Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR)
- U.S. Department of Commerce
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)

Most agency comments received, suggested that their issues and concerns be addressed in the next phase of the project. However, one agency, the U.S. Coast Guard, asked for additional text to be included in this Final EIS.

Two agencies (USEPA and IDNR) indicated a preference for selection of one alternative over the other. Both of these agencies favored Alternative E.

All agency comments have been responded to and can be found in Appendix L.

5.6.2 Public Comments

Public comments were received from local communities, interest groups, and citizens. Comments that were received from local communities were overwhelmingly in favor of Alternative E. In addition, comments that were received from citizens tended to favor Alternative E.

Morgan and Cass counties, and the cities of Jacksonville, South Jacksonville, Beardstown, and Rushville have all passed resolutions supporting the selection of Alternative E. In addition, the Jacksonville Regional Economic Development Corporation Board and the Brown County Development Board have both gone on record favoring Alternative E. The Western Prairie Audubon Society submitted a petition favoring Alternative E, stating that Alternative A would impact many threatened and endangered species. Finally, a petition, signed by 102 landowners and concerned citizens, was filed supporting selection of Alternative A.

Seven oral statements were made to the court reporters at the hearings. Just over 80 written comments were received during the course of, and following, the hearings. Of those, 31 comments indicated a preference for Alternative E and 19 indicated a preference for Alternative A, with the remaining indicating no preference for either alternative.

The public comments are summarized below and represent commonly occurring themes. They are grouped under four main headings corresponding to the Draft EIS that include Purpose and Need, Affected Environment, Alternatives, and Environmental Consequences. To review all written public comments in their entirety, see Appendix L.

Purpose and Need

Comment: The investment in the highway improvements appears to exceed the travel need.

Response: The basic purpose and need for improving U.S. 67 is linked to improved travel continuity through the area, improved travel efficiency, economic stability, and improving rural access. Fulfilling these objectives comes with a cost that is offset by quantitative and qualitative benefits. The resultant benefit of these improvements are improved mobility for people and goods, improved safety, and improved economic stability for the western region of Illinois. The economic value of the proposed improvements compared to the No-Build Alternative is expected to be almost \$2 billion over the next 20 years. Other benefits, which are more difficult to measure, include travel efficiency and rural access. Improved travel efficiency, for example, will yield shorter travel times and potential cost savings. Improved rural access will offer a better quality of life for area residents who would benefit from an improved home to work trip, or faster and safer travel to community or emergency services. The sum of these benefits will exceed the original cost of the project in terms of both measurable return on investment and numerous qualitative benefits to the traveling public.

Comment: The future travel forecasts are widely different for the build and no-build alternatives, and require further explanations.

Response: The projected traffic for this project was based on historical growth factors generated from years of traffic counts along with anticipated changes in traffic patterns. It must be reiterated that the purpose and need for this expressway is not based on projected traffic but a combination of factors including: improved highway continuity, improved travel efficiency, economic stability, potential to enhance economic development, and improved rural access along this corridor and western Illinois.

Affected Environment

No comments related to this section of the document.

Alternatives

Comment: Concern regarding traffic in vicinity of Triopia School under Alternative A – commentors support the overpass so local traffic would not have to cross expressway.

Response: IDOT developed two roadway options along Alternative A in the vicinity of Triopia School, an at-grade intersection at an overpass. IDOT supported and intended to implement the overpass over Triopia School Road under Alternative A. IDOT, however, in its final alignment decision, has selected Alternative E as its preferred alternative. Therefore, Alternative A is no longer a consideration.

Comment: The existing alignment should be followed through Chapin, thereby maintaining the viability of existing convenience businesses.

Response: The alignment near Chapin is offset slightly to the north of the existing highway. The offset would lessen the potential residential and business displacements in Chapin, as well as maintain local circulation. Chapin would be served by intersections linking the new highway with the remaining portion of the existing highway, thereby providing access to existing highway-oriented businesses.

Comment: The Beardstown Bypass location constrains the development potential on the westside of town.

Response: The decision to maintain the Illinois River crossing at its current location, and provide quality access to Beardstown controlled the location for the mainline and interchange. The mainline and interchange location will constrain development immediately adjacent to existing development (i.e. Walmart, etc.). The interchange, however, provides access to IL 125 and Beardstown. It would allow travel from the expressway and through the interchange to developable land south and west of Beardstown. This situation provides ample opportunity for new development, albeit separated from existing development.

Comment: Beardstown needs a second exit for travelers including access to Sixth Street.

Response: Travelers will be able to exit from the expressway at two locations, south of town, and at an interchange serving Beardstown and IL 125 near the east end of the Illinois River Bridge. This interchange will also provide convenient access to Sixth Street, which was a modification spurred by city officials and the general public.

Comment: In lieu of the proposed improvements, the Arenzville-Concord Road should be improved with minor improvements.

Response: This type of improvement would fail to meet the basic purpose and need for the proposed action. Regardless if the proposed action were implemented, the improvements for the Arenzville-Concord Road (i.e. improved signage, traffic signals, etc.) could be required for general growth in traffic volume. Roadway operational

conditions are regularly monitored by the responsible transportation agency and when improvements are necessary, they will be addressed.

Environmental Consequences

Comment: Why is right-of-way taken from only one side rather than equally from both sides for improvements?

Response: During the construction phase, this practice allows the existing roadway to remain operational while two new travel lanes are constructed. Following the construction of the initial two lanes, construction activities would switch to the reconstruction of the existing travel lanes.

Comment: A number of threatened and endangered species would be affected by the construction of Alternative A.

Response: The Illinois Department of Transportation selected Alternative E as the preferred alternative. The concern for threatened and endangered species along Alternative A has been eliminated.

Comment: The proposed improvements could impact farm water supplies and irrigation systems.

Response: A number of private wells including farm supplies are within 70 meters (200 feet) of the proposed right-of-way. Wells displaced by the project would be compensated or replaced. Measures would be implemented during construction to minimize potential contamination of wells near the right-of-way including filter strips and buffer areas. The concern for contamination, however, is low. This is attributed to travel volumes that are well below the threshold of concern for contaminants from roadway runoff. Typically, traffic volumes must be 30,000 ADT or greater to be of concern. The volumes on the proposed expressway will be half this amount even in the year 2020. If loss or impact to farmland irrigation system occurs, property owners will be compensated by IDOT. During the property acquisition stage, individual property owners will be contacted by IDOT to assess the extent of property impact.

Comment: Alternative E will be located on an elevated roadbed in the Illinois River floodplain causing a visual impact to the landscape.

Response: Alternative E will be located for several miles in the Illinois River floodplain, and will be elevated a distance of about 1 meter (3 feet) above the 100-year flood. This criterion requires sizable fill through the floodplain area. The resultant roadway fill will be a large manmade feature in the landscape, which would be considered an adverse visual element.

Comment: Alternative A would go through the wooded bluffs area southwest of Arenzville, which is one of the few undisturbed, remote locations in the area.

Response: It is true that Alternative A bisects some of the bluffs area south of Arenzville, which is a relatively undisturbed area. Alternative A was carefully

designed to avoid or minimize impact to special habitat that exists through that area. IDOT, however, in its final alignment decision, has selected Alternative E as its preferred alternative. Therefore, Alternative A is no longer a consideration.

Comment: Farmers indicated that Alternative A would establish a new barrier to the movement of farm equipment, whereas Alternative E has already established equipment movement patterns.

Response: Farmers near Alternative E currently travel along or across existing U.S. 67; therefore, these travel patterns are well established. Alternative A would have a barrier effect on farm machine movement that would cause adverse travel. However, IDOT has selected Alternative E as the preferred alternative, and this issue has been eliminated.

Comment: Alternative E would provide benefits to existing economic centers such as Meredosia.

Response: The majority of the communities located along existing U.S. 67 favored Alternative E, because it maintains transportation continuity to the communities that have depended upon the existing highway.

Comment: Alternative A is cheaper to build and is cheaper to travel (travel savings) between Jacksonville and Beardstown.

Response: We note the comment. The cost to build and travel savings are just two of many considerations that must be taken into account when selecting the best route. Other considerations include environmental, socioeconomic, and other engineering considerations.

Comment: Alternative A would require taxpayers to maintain two roadways (a new expressway and existing U.S. 67), thus increasing the overall tax burden.

Response: The long-term maintenance of a highway is costly. With Alternative A, there would be additional route miles of roadway to be maintained. The bottom line is that there would be a higher maintenance cost to the taxpayer. However, IDOT has selected Alternative E as the preferred alternative, and this issue has been eliminated.